

VZCZCXYZ0008
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHLM #0723/01 1231246
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 031246Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3290
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHDC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9158
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 6048
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4083
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2986
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9585
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3073
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2145
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000723

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/INS (CAMP, GOWER) SCA/PD (SCHWARTZ, SCENSNY,
PALLADINO)

UNCLASSIFIED

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: GUNMEN ATTACK TAMIL NEWSPAPER ON EVE OF WORLD PRESS
FREEDOM DAY

REF: Colombo 0713

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On the evening of May 2 unidentified gunmen entered the offices of the Tamil language newspaper Uthayan in the northern district of Jaffna and opened fire on the employees, killing two and wounding at least three. The Minister of Mass Media and Information condemned the attack the same evening at a dinner of media professionals gathered for a UNESCO conference, and President Rajapaksa has instructed the Inspector General of Police and the security forces to investigate. Because of the paper's pro-LTTE stance, media analysts suspect anti-LTTE paramilitaries of being behind the attack. Despite the President's pledge to get to the bottom of the killings and the arrest of four suspects May 3, the recent record of investigating and solving similar crimes is not encouraging. END SUMMARY

The Facts

¶2. (U) At approximately 7:30 PM local time on May 2, witnesses reported five men in civilian clothes arrived on two motorcycles and entered the two-story office of the pro-LTTE Tamil vernacular newspaper Uthayan, near downtown Jaffna. There are conflicting reports that the gunmen asked employees in the building the whereabouts of different senior reporters and editors, but all versions agree that, having not found their targets, the gunmen opened fire with assault weapons. The marketing manager and a press operator were shot dead and three others were seriously injured. The gunmen on one escaping motorcycle dropped a T-56 assault rifle after a soldier at a nearby checkpoint shot at them.

The Usual Suspects

¶3. (SBU) Because the Jaffna peninsula is heavily patrolled by more than 40,000 soldiers, sailors and police, popular suspicion immediately fell on government security forces and anti-LTTE

paramilitaries. LTTE mouthpiece Tamilnet.com accused the anti-Tiger Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) paramilitaries of conducting the attack. (The day before, Uthayan and its Colombo sister publication, Sudar Oli, had published a political cartoon lampooning EPDP leader Douglas Devananda as a shoeshine boy at the feet of President Rajapaksa.) The Uthayan building is on a major thoroughfare, only 150 meters from a fixed Sri Lankan Army (SLA) checkpoint and 250 meters away from two SLA garrison buildings. According to local residents, increased security measures had stationed a soldier every 50 meters along main roads. An Uthayan employee who left the building 20 minutes before the attack said he noticed that there were no soldiers on the street.

Government Response

¶4. (U) On May 3 Minister of Mass Media and Information Anura Yapa condemned the attack as a heinous attempt by armed terrorists to discredit the government while it hosted the UNESCO World Press Freedom Conference. President Rajapaksa has ordered the Sri Lanka Army and police to conduct a joint investigation and to report to him as soon as possible. On the afternoon of May 3, police reported arresting four suspects in the attack.

Comment

¶5. (SBU) The Uthayan victims are the fifth and sixth Tamil media personnel to have met violent ends within the last 12 months. Other recent killings of Tamils in government-controlled areas, such as the high profile slaying a year ago of TamilNet editor Dharmaretnam Sivaram, the December 24, 2005 killing of MP Joseph Pararajasingham, and the April 7 killing of MP-appointee V. Vigneswaran, and the lack of progress in solving these crimes, undermine Tamils' confidence in the government. Hopefully, a fast and professional law enforcement response will reduce rather than widen the divide between Tamils and the Sri Lankan

government. End Comment.

Lunstead